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ABSTRACT

Factors that influence teacher attrition are not well understood. Although past research has uncovered individual, work-related, and economic opportunity factors that influence teachers to leave their profession, more research is needed. This study (n=14,489) attempted to increase understanding of teacher's career decisions using data from the fifth followup of the National Longitudinal Study of 1972 (NLS-72) by answering four questions: (1) In what occupations were employed respondents in the 1986 NLS followup found? (2) How many persons from the cohort who became elementary or secondary teachers later took other jobs and in what occupations were leaving teachers found? (3) How many persons who intially entered other occupations subsequently took teaching jobs in elementary and secondary schools, and what occupations did they leave in order to teach? and (4) How did the salary experiences of persons who remained in elementary and secondary teaching compare with the experiences of those who never taught, those who left teaching for other occupations, and those who entered teaching from other occupations? The major findings indicated that 60 percent of the members of the sample were teaching in 1986. The remainder had either taken jobs in other fields or were unemployed. Generally, teachers who left education for positions in other areas received higher salaries than those who entered teaching from positions in other areas. However, job changers did not fare as well as those who stayed with their first occupational choice. Further analysis of the data revealed that the professional/technical, managerial/administrative, sales, and clerical tracks receive the bulk of the job-changers.(JAM)

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OCCUPATIONAL STAYERS AND STRAYERS: CAREER AND SALARY EXPERIENCES OF CURRENT AND FORMER TEACHERS

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Occupational Stayers and Strayers: Career and Salary Experiences of Current and Former Teachers

A number of reforms have been introduced into American elementary and secondary schools in recent years in an effort to improve the quality of instruction and, ultimately, increase student learning. Most of these initiatives have had one of three objectives: (1) to increase instructional time and the variety and depth of course offerings for students; (2) to improve the quality of teacher recruits and provide more rigorous preparation programs; and (3) to upgrade the effectiveness of the existing teaching force by providing improved supervisory assistance and implementing more rigorous evaluation procedures.

Reforms of the first type have included actions to reduce class size, lengthen the school day, or increase the number of credits required for graduation. Efforts to improve teacher quality have included stricter requirements for admission to teacher training programs and revisions in the teacher education curriculum. Certification requirements have been upgraded, and in some states new teachers are now required to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skill to succeed in the classroom before they are issued teaching certificates. Included in the third type of reforms are actions by local boards to implement new teacher evaluation procedures.

These initiatives ignore the problem of teacher attrition, even though it has been pointed out that recruiting better teachers will be futile unless schools are able to retain them (Schlechty & Vance, 1983). Some people who complete teacher training programs never take a teaching job, and of those who do teach, a sizable proportion, including many of the brighter teachers (Kerr, 1983), depart within a few years for other occupations.

Attrition is a major factor in determining the demand for teachers, yet relatively few states and even fewer school districts maintain accurate data on teacher turnover. The Center for Education Statistics uses an attrition rate of 6 percent in estimating national teacher demand, even though that figure is based on research that is now 20 years old (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987). Attrition rates vary from district to district and from time to time. The 1970s were a period of high attrition, but the rate of loss in recent years has dropped substantially.

Recent research suggests that the rate of attrition in teaching is no higher than loss from other professional and technical occupations and that it is lower than some (Teacher job entry, 1986).

Decisions to change jobs are influenced by individual, work-related, and economic opportunity factors (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980). We have a general understanding of the influence of individual and family factors on teacher attrition, but there is a need for more research into the part played by conditions of work in schools and economic factors such as salaries and supply/demand on these decisions (Rumberger, 1987).

Heyns (1988), analyzing NLS-72 data, concluded that schools that are generally thought to have more pleasant working conditions, including private schools and those in suburban locations, have higher rates of attrition than

other schools. That finding appears to contradict earlier research which indicated that teachers move from less to more wealthy districts and from districts with fewer able students toward districts with more students possessing high levels of cognitive skill (Greenberg & McCall, 1974).

There is also a need for research into employment experiences of teachers who change careers—what fields they go into, how much they earn, how satisfied they are in their new jobs and, how many, if any, eventually return to teaching. Returning teachers are a major source of supply in many districts, but most of these replacements are coming off leaves of absence or are resuming careers temporarily interrupted by child care responsibilities. We know even less about people who switch occupations to become teachers. We do not know how many people enter teaching after having tried other jobs, what fields they were in before they decided to teach, or what factors were instrumental in the decisions to go into teaching.

A major difficulty in developing and implementing policies aimed at reducing attrition is that relatively little is known about teachers' career decisions. Although we have fairly good knowledge of reasons given by high school and college students for choosing teaching careers, we know much less about the factors involved in their subsequent decisions to leave the classroom.

Methodology

This study attempts to increase understanding of teachers' career decisions using data from the fifth follow-up of the National Longitudinal Study of 1972 (NLS-72). Four questions are examined. They are:

(1) In what occupations were employed respondents in the 1986 survey found?

(2) How many persons from the cohort who became elementary or secondary teachers later took jobs in other fields, and what occupations did they choose?

(3) How many persons who initially entered other occupations subsequently took teaching jobs in elementary and secondary schools, and what occupations did they leave in order to teach?

(4) How did the salary experiences of persons who remained in elementary and secondary teaching compare with the experiences of those who never taught, those who left teaching for other occupations, and those who entered teaching from other occupations?

From a policymaker's perspective, the answers to these questions will provide useful information for future planning. Information about career decisions and salary experiences of present and former teachers can improve our understanding of how effectively teaching competes for talent and provide clues to actions that may help improve the occupation's future competitiveness. Information about labor flows between teaching and other occupations extends our knowledge of the fields with which teaching is in competition for talent

and helps policymakers to develop strategies for competing more effectively. Finally, information about the rate of attrition from a cohort can improve our ability to plan for future personnel needs.

Data from the fifth (1986) follow-up survey of the high school class of 1972 were used in the study. The sample is an unequal probability subsample consisting of 14,489 persons (Center for Education Statistics, 1987a). The fifth follow-up oversampled certain groups, including teachers and "potential teachers" (former teachers and persons trained to teach who had never taught). A supplementary questionnaire was mailed to members of the sample who held a teaching certificate or who had teaching experience (Center for Education Statistics, 1987b).

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were employed at the time they completed the questionnaire and to furnish information about their four most recent jobs, including the title, salary and the length of time in each position. On the basis of responses to those questions, respondents were assigned to one of eight groups:

(1) Non-teachers. These are employed individuals who have never held a position as a teacher.

(2) Strayers. These are former teachers who are currently employed in non-teaching positions.

(3) Converts. These are persons currently employed as teachers who formerly held non-teaching jobs.

(4) Stayers. These are current teachers who have not held a position other than teacher in their four most recent jobs.

(5) Not currently employed, never worked.

(6) Not currently employed, previously taught.

(7) Not currently employed, previously held non-teaching jobs.

(8) Not currently employed, no information on previous jobs.

The four groups consisting of individuals who were employed at the time of the survey were compared for overall mean salary and for salary by education level. Frequency distributions were reported for the current occupations of persons who formerly taught and for the previous occupations of persons currently teaching.

Findings

Almost four-fifths (79.0 percent) of the respondents held jobs at the time of the survey, as indicated in Table 1. The large majority (74.4 percent) are non-teachers. Less than 2 percent are individuals whose most recent jobs are all teaching positions (stayers). About 1.4 percent of the respondents are former teachers now holding non-teaching positions (strayers), and an about an

equal proportion are persons currently employed as teachers who previously held non-teaching jobs (converts). About 21 percent are not employed, but less than 1 percent are unemployed former teachers.

About 5.3 percent of the respondent group are currently employed or have been employed as elementary or secondary school teachers. Of those, 3.2 percent are now teaching, 1.4 percent are former teachers holding non-teaching jobs, and .7 percent are unemployed former teachers. Thus, about 60.4 percent of those who have ever taught are now teaching. That would be equivalent to a mean annual attrition rate of 4.9 percent if all had started teaching the same year. That figure is low compared to the rate found in other studies. However, in most studies attrition includes all teachers who leave their jobs in a given state or district, even though some transfer to positions in other localities. In the present study attrition included only individuals who changed occupations or became unemployed. This difference in definitions may account for the lower rate of attrition in this study.

One other study that defined attrition in a similar way to that used in this research drew on data from the 1970 United States Census (Talbert, quoted in Heyns, 1988). Of 30,000 persons who reported having been employed as teachers in 1965, about 70 percent were still teaching in 1970, yielding a mean annual attrition rate over five years of about 6.9 percent.

Mean annual salaries for six of the eight groups are reported in Table 1. Earnings were converted to an annualized figure based on data furnished by respondents. In the case of teachers who reported incomes on a monthly basis, that amount was multiplied by 9 to obtain the annual salary figure. This procedure may have had the effect of underestimating teachers' actual earnings, since some teachers work more than nine months each year.

For individuals who were employed at the time of the survey, Table 1 reports mean earnings from that job. For those who had previously held jobs but were not working in March 1986, the figures represent earnings in the most recent job.

Salary figures for some groups were suspiciously high. The mean salary for the non-teaching group was nearly $113,000. To correct for misreported or miscoded data, salary figures were adjusted by deleting from the analysis individuals whose annual salary was in excess of $100,000. This adjustment had the effect of reducing the mean for the non-teaching group by nearly $90,000 and for the other groups by amounts ranging from about $1300 to $13,000.

The employed group with the highest mean salary ($23,243) is non-teachers. Strayers, former teachers currently holding non-teaching jobs, come next, with mean earnings of $19,111, or about 82 percent of the mean for non-teachers, followed by stayers, teachers whose four most recent jobs were all teaching positions. The mean salary for that group is $18,784, equal to 81 percent of the mean salary earned by non-teachers. Persons who left other jobs to enter teaching (converts) trail with an average salary of $16,241, equal to about 70 percent of the salary of the non-teaching group.

Strayers have a slightly higher mean salary than stayers ($19,111 vs. $18,784). However, the difference is small ($327), and considering the fact that most non-teaching jobs are 12-month positions, strayers as a group earn less proportionally than teachers in the sample. However, as reported below, mean salaries of members of the strayers group vary considerably depending upon occupation.

One factor that influences the salaries of teachers is the level of education attained. Data in Table 2 show mean salaries of four employed groups by education level. Three levels of education are reported--no degree, bachelors, and advanced degree, including Masters and doctorate.

The mean salary of non-teachers with bachelors degrees is 78 percent of the mean salary for persons in the same group with advanced degrees. Stayers and converts with bachelors degrees earn about 81 percent of the mean for members of those groups with advanced degrees. Strayers with bachelors degrees earn 86 percent of the advanced salary degree mean for that group. Thus, non-teachers receive the largest salary advantage for an advanced degree, followed by stayers and converts. The advantage is smallest for strayers.

The salary mean for stayers with advanced degrees is $21,669, which is equivalent to approximately $28,892 on an annualized basis. That figure represents only about 78.6 percent of the $36,739 mean salary earned by non-teachers with advanced degrees but is more on a per-month basis than the salary of strayers with a similar level of education. It is not surprising that advanced degrees do not result in a financial advantage for teachers who take jobs in other fields, since a degree in an unrelated field would not be expected to enhance one's qualifications or earnings.

Former teachers frequently cite low salaries when asked their reasons for leaving the classroom (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1985), but the evidence presented here suggests that individuals in the sample who left teaching achieved only slight increases in earnings. Most of the NLS-72 sample entered the job market during the middle to late 1970s, a period during which the demand for teachers declined sharply in some parts of the United States (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987). It is likely that some of them left teaching involuntarily and may have been forced by economic necessity to accept jobs paying less then they had earned in teaching.

Members of the converts group earned 90.2 percent of the mean salary of stayers with similar levels of education at both the bachelors and advanced degree levels. Converts' lower salaries are probably due to the fact that they have taught for a shorter time. Converts without degrees had a higher mean salary than stayers, but the number of non-degree teachers in the sample is quite small.

One of the questions addressed in this study concerned the occupational destinations of strayers and the occupational origins of converts. Table 3 presents that information and also shows the occupational distribution for non-teachers and stayers. The most pronounced differences in the frequency of occupational choices of strayers and non-teachers occurs in college teaching, managerial/administrative, sales (strayers more often choose those

fields) and craftsman and operatives (non-teachers more often choose those fields). Former teachers who hold managerial jobs include some school administrators, but the number is small. Former teachers holding positions as school administrators constitute less than 3 percent of all individuals in managerial/administrative positions.

Sales work is attractive to ex-teachers because it pays well and affords greater ease of entry than some other occupations. Individuals who have been trained to teach and have little or no experience in other fields are at a disadvantage in securing alternative employment but often are able to enter sales work with a relatively small amount of additional training.

Almost one-fifth of members of the strayers group hold clerical jobs. For these individuals, the change from teaching to the current job represents a step down in both status and salary, and for some the move may have have been brought about because of terminations or reductions in force.

Occupational origins of members of the convert group are also shown in Table 3. Over-represented occupations, as compared to the distribution of non-teaching jobs, were sales, clerical, and service. Fewer than expected entered teaching from managerial/administrative, crafts and operative fields. The relatively large number of persons moving between teaching and clerical jobs suggests that that field absorbs the excess when teachers are in oversupply and releases them as jobs become available. Clerical jobs may also serve as temporary stopovers for teachers who are relocating are who for various reasons are unable to teach. Sales occupations operate in a somewhat similar fashion, but the flow between teaching and sales is more equally balanced. About 11 percent of the members of the converts group enter teaching from service occupations, but a much smaller proportion (about 4 percent) of strayers hold jobs in the service field.

The non-teaching occupations with the highest mean salaries are managerial/administrative, professional/technical, sales, and craftsman (Table 4). The group with the highest mean salary is the managerial class. Non-teachers in that occupation have a mean salary of nearly $29,000. The mean salary of non-teaching craftsmen is the smallest of the four ($24,500). Almost two-thirds (65.7 percent) of the strayers work in one of those four occupations after leaving teaching.

Strayers earn less than non-teaching members of all four of those occupations, but they come closest to parity with the non-teaching group in sales. Strayers in sales work earn 97.5 percent of the salary mean of the non-teaching group. For managers, the figure is 76.9 percent; for craftsman, 75.8; and for professional/technical, 72.1 percent.

The table shows that strayers' salaries vary considerably, depending upon the occupation they choose when they leave teaching. Those who enter managerial/administrative or sales jobs do best, with their salary means exceeding those received by stayers with an advanced degree. Advanced degree teachers earn a mean salary of $21,669 (Table 2), while strayers who hold administrative/managerial jobs earn about 2.5 percent more than the teachers, and those with sales jobs earn approximately 14 percent above what advanced

degree teachers are paid. Strayers in clerical or operative jobs do least well; those holding clerical positions on the average earn less than three-fourths of the amount received by advanced degree stayers, and operatives are paid slightly more than one-half of what teachers with advanced degrees make.

With which other fields does teaching compete? The occupations that attract the largest number of teachers are professional/technical, managerial/administrative, and clerical. Those fields also contribute the largest numbers of converts to teaching. Of the occupations listed in Table 4, in terms of salary, teaching is most competitive with operative/laborer, clerical, and craftsman fields and least competitive with managerial/administrative and sales. Former teachers in clerical positions have a higher mean salary than non-teachers in those positions (a difference of $309 or about 2 percent). In sales, the difference in mean salaries between the two groups is $641 or about 2.5 percent, with non-teachers earning more than strayers.

Sales may be an attractive alternative occupational choice for teachers who are unhappy with their salaries or who simply wish to change jobs. A better understanding of the factors involved in movement among clerical and sales jobs and teaching may be attained by examining the reasons given by job changers for leaving the most recent job.

Summary

About 60 percent of the members of the NLS-72 sample who have have ever taught were teaching in 1986. The remainder had either taken jobs in other fields or were unemployed. Since this is a cohort figure, district and state attrition figures over the same period of time would be higher and would vary depending on local economic factors, alternative employment opportunities, and conditions in the schools. During the ten-year period that 1972 high school graduates have been teaching, attrition from teaching among the respondents was balanced by recruitment into teaching of persons from other fields. It is not clear from the data analyzed in this study whether these persons had taken other jobs while waiting for an opening in teaching or had originally intended to pursue careers in other fields and had changed their minds. Additional study of late entrants and converts to teaching is needed to clarify these questions.

Job-changers in this sample (strayers and converts) do not fare as well in salary as individuals who persist in their first occupational choices (non-teachers and stayers). Strayers earn about 82 percent as much as non-teachers, and converts receive 86 percent as much as stayers. Strayers with advanced degrees earn 60 percent of the mean salary of non-teachers with advanced degrees, but converts with advanced degrees earn about 90 percent of the salary of advanced degree stayers, about the same as the ratio for bachelors degree converts. Advanced degrees pay off for converts but not for strayers.

The study shows that four occupations (professional/ technical, managerial/administrative, sales, and clerical) are the source of almost three-fourths (74.3 percent) of converts to teaching and are the recipients of four-fifths (81.6 percent) of strayers from teaching. Two of the occupations

(professional/technical and managerial/ administrative) have a net gain from teaching in the exchange, while the other two (sales and clerical) record a net loss to teaching.

Table 1

Number and Weighted Percentage of Respondents and Adjusted Mean Salary by Group

	N	Weighted Percent	Mean Salary (N)
Non-teachers (Currently employed, never taught)	9,071	74.4	$23,243 (8,041)
Strayers (Former teachers holding non-teaching jobs)	233	1.4	19,111 (209)
Converts (Current teachers, previously held non-teaching jobs)	234	1.3	16,241 (206)
Stayers (Current teachers, only taught)	396	1.9	18,784 (342)
Not currently employed (never worked)	405	3.9	———
Not currently employed (previously taught)	130	0.7	11,799 (99)
Not currently employed (previously held non-teaching jobs)	1,805	15.7	15,868 (1,493)
Not currently employed (no information on previous jobs)	55	0.6	———
Total	12,329	99.9	

Salary figures for persons not currently employed represent earnings on most recent job.

Table 2

Mean Salaries of Four Employed Groups by Education and Ratio of Bachelors Degree Salary to Advanced Degree Salary

Group	No degree	Bachelors	Advanced Degree	Ratio (B/AD)
Non-teachers	$20,929	$28,582	$36,739	77.8
N	2,641	1,835	832	
Strayers	16,108	19,099	22,186	86.1
N	32	103	56	
Converts	12,293	15,817	19,538	81.0
N	15	111	66	
Stayers	11,967	17,534	21,669	80.9
N	9	188	130	

Table 3

Current Occupations of Non-teachers, Strayers, and Stayers and Previous Occupations of Converts

	Group* 1	2	3	4
	Weighted percent			
Professional/technical	26.1	27.5	23.6	——
College teacher	0.7	7.3	0.9	——
Teacher	——	——	——	100.0
Manager/Administrator	18.6	25.8	14.2	——
Sales	6.4	9.0	10.3	——
Clerical	18.7	19.3	26.2	——
Craftsman	10.4	3.4	4.7	——
Operative/Laborer	11.3	3.0	8.2	——
Service	4.6	3.9	10.7	——
Health	1.2	0.9	1.3	——
Protective	1.8	——	——	——
Total	99.8	100.1	100.1	100.0
N	9071	233	233	396

*1=Non-teachers (currently in non-teaching jobs, never taught)
2=Strayers (former teachers, currently in non-teaching jobs)
3=Converts (current teachers, previously in non-teaching jobs)
4=Stayers (current teachers, never held non-teaching jobs)
(Some totals do not equal 100.0 because of rounding.)

Table 4

Mean Salaries in Selected Occupations by Group and Ratio of Strayers' Mean Salary to Advanced Degree Teachers' Salaries

Occupation	Non-teachers (N)	Strayers (N)	Ratio
Professional-technical	$28,307 (2149)	$20,412 (58)	94.2
Managerial-administrative	28,911 (1487)	22,221 (55)	102.5
Sales	25,370 (509)	24,729 (18)	114.1
Clerical	15,651 (1519)	15,960 (37)	73.7
Craftsman	24,491 (825)	18,569 (8)	85.7
Operative-laborer	19,843 (887)	11,495 (7)	53.0

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